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DOMENICI RELEASES REPORT ON RADIATION STANDARDS

GAO Investigation Says EPA-NRC Standard Disputes Costly

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today asserted that the findings of a General Accounting Office (GAO) report on radiation standards policies underscore the need to resolve regulatory impasses that could cost taxpayers billions of extra dollars in the near future.

Domenici today unveiled the GAO report he requested last year seeking an update to a 1994 study on radiation standards protection in the United States. The GAO update is titled "*Radiation Standards: Scientific Basis Inconclusive, and EPA and NRC Disagreement Continues.*" [GAO/RCED-00-52]

"I welcome this report if it will serve to propel Congress and our federal agencies to reach for a consensus on dealing with radiation standards. Dueling NRC and EPA regulatory standards stand as an impediment to national progress on waste disposal, power plant decommissioning and decontamination, and ultimately the future of nuclear power in this country," Domenici said.

Domenici had asked the GAO to update its 1994 report, "*Consensus on Acceptable Radiation Risk to the Public Is Lacking*" [GAO/RCED-94-190], looking specifically at whether current U.S. radiation standards are based on verified science, whether the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Environmental Protection Agency can agree on standards, and how standards affect nuclear waste clean up and disposal costs.

In general, the report finds that:

- Regulatory standards to protect the public from the potential health risks of nuclear radiation basically "lack a conclusively verified scientific basis;"
- The EPA and NRC, after attempting since 1992 to reach a consensus on standards, have not agreed and "may not easily agree" on standards;
- Costs to clean up sites, decommission power plants, and establish a nuclear waste disposal facility at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, will rise exponentially the more strict the standards; and,
- According to the National Academy of Sciences, EPA draft standards on Yucca Mountain are scientifically unsupported and provide little, or no, health benefits.

"On the bright side, the report should reassure the public that both EPA and NRC standards set regulatory levels so low that benefits may not be clearly demonstrated. However, the report further confirms my concern that United States nuclear policy as a

whole is tied in knots. The ramifications are serious in this post-Cold War era as we direct our attention toward cleaning up our nuclear weapons production sites and decommissioning aging nuclear power facilities. The cost to the American people is already huge, with baseline costs for DOE cleanups alone exceeding \$200 billion,” Domenici said.

“Congress should evaluate legislative approaches to either force EPA and NRC to define one standard or give responsibility to one agency,” he said. “At the same time, I will continue to fund the DOE program on low-dose radiation effects.”

Domenici, chairman of the Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee, on Thursday led subcommittee consideration of the FY2001 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill that contains \$20.1 million for the DOE research program to address the effects of low-level radiation within human cells.